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Gila National Forest Experiencing Early Fire Season

(Silver City, NM – January 16, 2006) This year's fire season is starting much earlier on the Gila National Forest than in recent years. To date, firefighters have responded to four fires—the first one reported on January 2, 2006. The common theme, is that they've all been person-caused fires, two of those fires were the result of abandoned campfires.

The Iron fire was reported on Sunday afternoon with five volunteer fire departments and one Forest Service engine responding to the fire near Wright's Cabin, just west of Emory Pass in the Black Range. The Upper Mimbres Volunteer Fire Department was holding its regular monthly training session, when the call came in. Members mobilized quickly, followed by volunteer firefighters from the Sapillo, Lower Mimbres, Pinos Altos and Whiskey Creek Volunteer Fire Departments. The Forest Service engine arrived on the scene later and was able to release the volunteer fire departments from the incident. "Fortunately, the fire department equipment had plenty of water that they were able to use to douse out the flames. The fire was easily accessed from State Highway 152, since the fire was only about 80 yards from the road, so they were able to limit the spread of the fire," said Leo Trujillo, Forest Service engine boss. "The final size of the fire was estimated to be ½ acre," Trujillo added.

As forest and fuel conditions continue to be assessed and evaluated, it's clear that the Forest Service and other agencies with wildland firefighting capabilities will be bracing for an early season with great potential for above normal fire activity and an increased risk of large fire incidents. The current conditions have resulted from a combination of situations including: an abundance of carryover fine herbaceous fuels from the wet 2004-2005 winter; significant precipitation deficit since the weak 2005 monsoon, and nearly non-existent mountain snowpack; forecast of continued warm and dry conditions through May; lower elevation, lighter fuel types susceptible to fire through the winter; and in the mid to high elevations, heavier fuel types to support significant fire activity by April.

As fire managers and firefighters prepare for a long season, one key activity in the wildland firefighting realm remains at the forefront—wildfire prevention. Engaging in

wildfire prevention activities is something that everyone can participate in, whether it's teaching children about fire safety or creating defensible space around homes and on private property. Defensible space has proven its benefits time and time again when catastrophic fires have threatened communities, homes, and businesses. Individuals who had taken the time to create defensible space had homes to return to, those who did not dealt with much higher risks of property loss and damage. To find out more about creating defensible space, please visit the website: www.firewise.org or call (505) 388-8245.

For general information regarding fire activity on the Gila National Forest, please contact the fire information officer at 505-388-8245 or visit the website: www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila.

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